

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE (RASA) IN INDIAN THEATRICAL WORKS

-- SATYA VRAT SHASTRI

The simple sūtra of the Bharata Nāṭya-Śāstra, 'vibhāvanubhāvavyabhicārisamyogadrasanispattiḥ' has been variously interpreted by scholars with pre-possessions and obsessions inspired by a devoted study of their cherished schools of thought (darsanas). What we in common parlance call as causes, effects, and co-operating agents with reference to the abiding emotion (Sthāyābhāva), such as Rati, pleasure of love, are known as vibhāvas, anubhāvas and vyabhicāribhāvas, respectively in a poetic or dramatic composition. Here dramatic presentation and poetic excellences and embellishments lend them a unique force which transforms their character. The element of vibhāvanā contributes most to the development of this force which is missing in the ordinary causes, etc. Now according to Mammata, Rasa or aesthetic enjoyment is the abiding emotion manifested or made an object of relish (carvanā) by the conjunction of vibhāvas, anubhāvas and vyabhicāribhāva, the fundamental determinants.

Bhatta Lollata's View

According to Bhatta Lollata, the abiding emotion such as pleasure of love is engendered by generating causes

such as a heroine, is excited by excitants such as the moon-light, is revealed or exhibited by revealing effects such as a side-glance and fostered by co-operating agents such as despondency. The Sthāyibhāva thus matured becomes a matter of experience and is called Rasa. Although Rasa primarily emerges in the hero, yet by his make-up and dress and by his imitation of the hero's actions, the actor gives the impression for the time being at least, of being the hero himself. Rasa too appears to exhibit itself in the actor also. This supposed existence of Rasa is realized by the spectators through Jñāna-lakṣaṇa (imagination). This realization constitutes the aesthetic enjoyment in the audience by the captivating nature of the plot and the exquisite acting. Bhaṭṭa Lollāṭa takes saṁyoga in the Bharata sūtra in the sense of the relation of the producer and the produced and niṣpatti in the sense of production.

The gist of what this theoretician has to say is : just as we have a dread of a string mistakeⁿ for a snake which alone should be a cause of it, love, rati which originally and really abides in Rāma (Rāmāśrayā) is conceived as if present in the actor, so skilful is his presentation, and thus supposed it causes unique charm in the appreciative minds and being experienced is called Rasa.

This exposition is far from convincing. How can the audience have a charm (camatkāra) which it undoubtedly

has, unless Rasa is produced in itself ? The charm of aesthetic enjoyment is an actual experience and not mere imagination.

Śaṅkuka's View

Bhaṭṭa Śaṅkuka thinks that Rasa is inferred and is an imitation of the Sthāyibhāva. According to him niṣpatti in the Bharata Sūtra means anumiti inference. The actor who has received prolonged training in acting from his teacher and has developed wonderful skill in acting so that he can produce horripilation by means of the artificial vibhāvas, anubhāvas and vyabhicārībhāvas may reasonably appear as the hero to the audience. By means of these vibhāvas, etc. which though artificial are understood as real by the audience, the abiding emotion such as Rati is inferred to be existing in the actor. From the very nature of the emotions which is intrinsically charming, this inference is different from other worldly inferences, and produces a unique charm. The repeated inferential experience of that charm by the audience is called carvanā (relishing). The being present in the spectators, it is reasonable to conclude that Rasa is also present in them.

All this may be summed up thus :

Just as in a place covered with mist, smoke is assumed and the presence of fire inferred, in like manner,

the skilled actor presents the vibhāvas, etc. as his own, though they are not present at the time. Through them, thus looked upon, Rati, etc. is inferred to be present in the actor, and thus inferred, it causes charm in the audience from the very nature of the emotions and is experienced as Rasa.

The weakness of this theory lies in that it goes against actual experience. Charm which is experienced by the Sahr̥daya is a result of direct perception and never of inference. Mere cognition without direct perception is incapable of producing charm. Such an extra-ordinary experience is not possible, unless Rasa is produced in the spectator's own heart. Moreover, unless there is a series of inferences, there cannot be an unbroken experience of carvanā or a continuous flow of Rasa, but repeated inference is precluded by the fact that the abiding emotion having been once inferred, there remains no scope for even a second inference, much less for a third one. The falsity of the inference, too, is later realized, yet the relish is there, and the anuvyavasāya viz. 'I have had aesthetic enjoyment' is also there. This knocks the bottom out of this theory.

Bhatta Nāyaka's View

Bhatta Nāyaka thinks that Rasa is neither produced, nor inferred, nor manifested. It is not an experience either. Rasa cannot be produced in the actor, for the

fundamental determinants, the vibhāvas, etc. are absent at the time of performance. Nor can it be inferred, for them it being a matter of inference, it cannot give exquisite blissful delight, which only direct perception can. Nor can it be manifested, just as things shrouded in darkness are lighted up by a lamp; and Rasa is not pre-existent, for the audience does not constitute the fundamental determinants. How is the Rasa experienced? Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka answers that words in a poetic or dramatic composition have two more powers besides the recognized powers of Abhidhā, Lakṣaṇā and Vyañjanā and they are bhāvakatva and bhojakatva. Bhāvakatva is aesthetic contemplation. This power of words operates after Abhidhā has denoted a sense of a word, say, Sītā as the daughter of Janaka and the beloved wife of Rāma. It helps dispel the notion of agamyatvā, not to be loved, opposed to the emergence of Rasa and presents her as a mere beloved not at all associated with Rāma and unrelated to Janaka. Thus the operation of this power of words helps to remove all traces of the impropriety that is otherwise involved in admitting perfect identification of an ordinary spectator with a divine personage like Rāma and looking upon his vibhavas, etc., as his own. This power of words leads to a very significant development; viz. universalization of the agent of love (āśraya), the object of love (ālambana vibhāva) and the Sthāyibhāva and even the spectator himself.

judgment, determination, the vision, the sense
at the time of performance. Now one is to be judged, for
there is being a subject of judgment, it cannot give
exclusive critical opinion, which only direct perception
can, nor can it be restricted, just as things are
in themselves are limited by a form and form is not
pre-existent, for the substance does not consist in the
fundamental determinations. Now in the case mentioned
of the things around that world in a position of knowledge
composition have the same power besides the recognized
power of the object, subject and object and they are
invariant, and the object, subject, is essential
non-variation. This power of being constant after all
is beyond a sense of a word, say, *light* or the shadow
of light and the shadow with of light, it is light itself
the notion of *light*, not to be loved, present to the
experience of light and presence for as a word follows for
it is associated with light and related to light. This
the operation of this power of words helps to reveal all
forms of the language that is otherwise revealed in
adjoining perfect identification of an ordinary speaker
with a divine language like time and looking upon the
others, etc., as his own. This power of words leads to
a very significant development viz. universalization of
the sense of love (Lovers), the object of love (Loved one)
universal and the language and even the speaker himself

Each one of these is stripped of the particularizing properties that go to make up his personality; viz., all these undergo transformation and become impersonal. This is what is known as sādhāranīkaraṇa.

As soon as the bhāvakatva power of words has operated, the bhojakatva power starts functioning. It helps to dispel all passion (rajas) and ignorance (tamas) from the mind and arouses purity (sattva) in it. Thus the mind enjoys the hero's experience as an unmixed bliss. The self of the audience with its blissful consciousness (cidānandātman) stands revealed in its full glory like the sun freed from the covering of a cloud, etc., and fully enjoys the extant abiding emotion. This exquisite enjoyment (bhoga) is called Rasa and is brahmānandasahodara.

Abhinavagupta's View

Abhinavagupta thinks that Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's view that Rasa is not an experience does not appear to be sound, for it is difficult to understand what that enjoyment can be, if it is not an experience. True, this experience is different from other ordinary experiences, nevertheless it is nothing else than a relish and is expressed by such words as rasana, āsvadana, carvaṇā. As to the bhāvakatva power of words, Abhinavagupta has to say that such a new power need not be ascribed to words. What is sought to be effected by this supposed power, can be easily, accomplished

through excellences, embellishments, etc. in a poetic composition and through such means of gratification as the rapturous music, vocal and instrumental, skilful fourfold acting, etc. in a dramatic composition which succeeds in changing a comparatively unappreciative mind into one full of appreciation. Moreover, bhāvakatva cannot be said to belong exclusively either to words or their sense. Mere words cannot have bhāvakatva in the absence of the knowledge of their sense. The sense of words alone can have it neither; for their^e is none when the same sense is conveyed by other words. The fact is that bhāvakatva is no other than the power of suggestion already affirmed of words by eminent authorities like Ānandavardhana.

Bhoga too is not caused by words, but by the same power of suggestion; for bhoga is another name of āsvāda which is of the form of the mellowing, oilation and expansion of the internal organ. The abiding emotion which is ever present in a latent form can be reasonably said to be manifested (abhivyakta) or made into a direct experiences by the conjunction of the vibhāvas; etc. According to Abhinavagupta niṣpatti in the Bharata Sūtra stands for abhivyakti.

Abhinavagupta accepts in principle the universalization of the vibhāvas, etc; but for this he says : "We need not postulate another power of words. Universalization is made

possible by the fact that the spectator is unable to determin^e whether the particular vibhāvas, etc. are exclusively his own, of the enemy alone, of an indifferent person alone or are not exclusively his own, etc. etc.

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